

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

CURRICULUM GRADES K-4

TEACHER: LESSON 3

THEME: MANY GOOD IDEAS, BUT ONLY ONE VOTE

Engaging students in discussions about voting is an excellent way to help them move from shallow to deep thinking, and to demonstrate the higher order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The exercises below are designed to help students internalize the importance of voting so they are more likely to become active voters when they reach adulthood.

Tasks:

1. Identifies the roles and responsibilities of community members.
2. Participates in civic discussions.
3. Explains actions citizens in a community can take to influence public policy.
4. Describes how government meets certain needs of the community.
5. Explains how public policies are used to address the common good and individual rights.
6. Analyzes community problem(s), considers solutions, makes a decision and can support the decision with logical reasons.

ACTIVITIES:

Discuss school levies/bond issues. Some people vote for them, others vote against them. Ask, "Why would a person vote for a school issue?" "Why would someone vote against it?"

Ask students what they would say to a person who remarks, "I don't vote for school improvements because I don't have any children," or "I don't vote for improved highways because I don't drive," or "I'm going to vote against money for the library because I never use it." These questions, and others like them, can be used to generate discussions about responsibilities of community members, and voting "for the common good."

Discuss the difference between public servants who are elected (e.g., mayors, council members, school board members) and those who are not (firefighters, police officers, and teachers.) Help students understand that elected officials have tremendous influence over those who are not. How can a school board election affect what goes on in your classroom?

It was elected officials who decided that Washington State should have EALRs and the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). What do students think about this? Ask, "If you were an elected official, would you vote for EALRs and the WASL? Why or why not?"

Ask students to identify a problem at school (e.g., litter, fighting, bullying) that they would like to see improved. (They could vote to decide which problem to address.) Divide them into small groups and ask them to come up with their best idea for a solution to the problem, and to present it to the class. Each group should be prepared to field questions from other class members. When all the groups have presented, distribute secret ballots and ask students to "vote" for the solution they believe will best solve the problem. When the results have been tallied, lead a discussion about why students voted as they did. Ask them if they could support the "winner" even if they didn't vote for it?

Early in the school year, tell students that they will be voting on a number of measures during the year. Ask them to register to vote, and remind them frequently that they are registered voters. When a new student joins the class, make sure one of the students helps him/her register to vote. Create a poll book and make sure students sign it before they are allowed to vote. Have a discussion about why registration and signing the poll book are important parts of voting in the adult world.

During the various class "votes" during the year, look for opportunities to show how only one or two votes can make a difference in the outcome. If a student knows that he/she will be absent during a vote, issue an absentee ballot and ask the student to mail it in to the school.